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INFORMATION REPORT**

COUNTRY Korea

SUBJECT Impressions of North Korea

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1. Our party entered North Korea in the summer of 1953, traveling under the close surveillance of our unwilling Communist hosts. We traveled alternately in antiquated trucks, Soviet-made jeeps, and on trains over roads for the most part indecribably bad and through country unbelievably desolate. Our every movement was watched to the extent that it was impossible for us even to perform natural functions without the presence of an armed guard. In addition to the crude and uncomfortable conditions of travel we were subjected constantly to insulting epithets, being frequently referred to as "capitalist bastards" and other names equally difficult to accept with equanimity.
2. Our work was to assist in the repatriation of POW's, to offer what comforts we could, to check on health conditions and to look into the general conditions in the camps. In our interrogations of prisoners we were never left alone, but had to ask our questions in the presence of the North Korean officers. Consequently, the answers we received were anything but satisfactory. For example, if we asked a ROK prisoner a question about the food he was given he would parrot a remark something like this - "The capitalist actions have attempted to enslave the free people of Korea." We could, however, see plainly what were the living conditions of the POW's. They were housed in wooden barracks of the crudest construction or mud bricks, with space for sleeping and "recreation". These halls were roofed but open at the sides and cook houses were separate buildings. Prisoners' food consisted of rice, fish and occasionally vegetables. North Korean authorities informed us that although their country was not a signatory of the Geneva Convention, they abide by its terms and even treated their prisoners better than the UN did theirs. Everything they told us, however, was a tissue of lies, and when you realize that I, who was given the red carpet treatment, lost 19 pounds during my stay in this Communist Eden you can imagine what was the lot of POW's. We were given large amounts of Korean caviar, fish of various kinds,

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including fish beads, a dish resembling diced angleworms, Chinese beer and occasionally Chinese port wine, English bully beef, and a few vegetables. After a few essays at this diet I confined myself to a diet of bread and jelly. The authorities informed us that POW's would be repatriated in Pullman coaches, but when we inspected the transportation provided we learned it consisted of cattle cars. Nevertheless, the Communists persisted in their claim that they were Pullmans. Nearly every question was answered with a bald-faced lie, which fact seemed to cause our hosts not the slightest embarrassment.

3. The officer in charge of our group was a Colonel Hon, a North Korean of about 35 years of age, who in addition to lies and insults attempted to pump us concerning our backgrounds and our official activities. We were sometimes aroused as late as 2:00 A.M. with the information that Colonel Hon requested our presence at a moving picture. To refuse would be taken as an insult so we reluctantly acquiesced. The movies were of Chinese, Soviet and Hungarian origin. One Chinese picture was an old fairy tale of "The Girl with White Hair" told with a Communist bias, another, of Soviet make, was a well done, well photographed opera. A third was a Chinese picture purporting to unmask the bestiality of US soldiers, and it so revolted me that I left before the showing was over. An interpreter later informed me that I had insulted Colonel Hon, and I replied that I was not disturbed because he had insulted me. We were permitted only to have candles in our quarters, and we were told there was no electricity available, but there was plenty to show those moving pictures.

We were never quartered near POW camps but generally had to arise about 2:30 or 3:00 A.M. and take a three or four-hour motor ride to reach them. We would remain at camp until about 3:00 P.M. and reach our quarters at dusk. On these trips in the area about Manp'ojin we twice saw forced labor groups and once a new bridge across the Yalu. This latter was a not very strong looking affair located about two miles north of Manp'ojin and for rail use only. We came upon the forced labor groups unexpectedly and through error, and thereby caused embarrassment to our conductors. The groups consisted entirely of old men surrounded by armed guards, who upon sighting us ducked into a nearby corn field. We could, however, without much difficulty see them with their guns trained on their unfortunate victims.

Travel was everywhere precarious and uncomfortable. At one point we endured 15 consecutive days of torrential rains which resulted in numerous landslides and washouts. The trucks which accompanied us were equipped with railroad ties and whenever we reached a washout, they would be unloaded and placed across the gap, then we would go over on foot, the vehicles would cross on the ties, which would then be reloaded for use at the next washout. No attempt was made to clear landslides and our convoy would merely crawl over or around them. Once on a rail trip between Pyongyang and Manp'ojin we crossed a newly constructed bridge over a large river. It was the flimsiest structure I ever saw, and as we crossed the flat cars on which we were riding tilted at a dangerous angle. I was equally surprised and relieved when we reached the opposite side in safety.

6. Riding through the country we saw few people and fewer houses. People were there, however, for we could see them laboriously tilling their crops of corn, tea and wheat to the very tops of the mountains. The corn patches especially looked thin and ill favored. We saw not many women on the roads, fewer old men, and very few children. What children we did see all wore the Chinese quilted costume, which may or may not be a uniform of a Communist youth group. Villages rarely ever had many houses standing and even in the cities the population apparently lived underground for the most part. In Pyongyang a slight effort had been made to utilize the first floors of bombed-out buildings as shops and offices. Outside one or two such shops I observed long queues of people patiently waiting for whatever meager goods were to be had within. In Kaesong at the railroad station I noted hundreds of charred, burned-out box cars in the yards, and apparently nothing was being done either to clear them away or repair them.

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Even our physical discomforts in North Korea had a bearing on the economic and military situation there. We were allowed to carry only one change of clothes with us and it soon became imperative to have laundry done. Our clothes were taken away with the promise that they would be returned in 10 days. After a time some of us tried to expedite the process and were informed that they would be returned the "day after yesterday". We exclaimed that they must mean the day after tomorrow but were haughtily told that "when the superior intelligence of our military says the day after yesterday" it means just that. Our informant, however, went away and presently returned to say that the superior intelligence of the military stated the clothes would be returned the day after tomorrow. I mention this to indicate how blindly all follow instructions. It was only in rare instances that one of our guards or interpreters so far forgot himself as to make a statement of true fact in contradiction to the official assertions. Once a doctor told us that there had been no antibiotics in North Korea since the war began. We could well believe this since the hospitals were primitive to a degree. They were generally housed in buildings which were at least partially intact, and their beds often consisted of boards across trestles. Operating rooms looked more like a US doctor's examining room, and one operating table bore a strange likeness to a barber's chair. The Communists continued to assert that they had an ample supply of antibiotics but we saw none. One of our party became ill and at the hospital the doctor tried to give him an injection of some unknown drug using a syringe of Soviet make, which looked like a toy. Our friend resisted strenuously.

8. We saw trainloads of Chinese soldiers going north, but never saw any Soviets in the area. We did not see a single plane during our stay. I saw one air field at Kaesong where reconstruction work, such as filling in holes on runways, was in progress. In riding through the country once in a while I would wave to an old woman passing. Their reactions were always the same. First they would stare blankly, then suddenly break into a broad smile.

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